

VZCZCXYZ0000  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNM #0607 1681302  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 161302Z JUN 08  
FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4367

UNCLAS NIAMEY 000607

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [NG](#)

SUBJECT: NIGER: FORMER PRIME MINISTER REACTS TO CORRUPTION CHARGES

REF NIAMEY 603

11. Summary: Former Prime Minister Hama Amadou held a press conference on Saturday, June 14, regarding the GON's request for a National Assembly resolution to indict him on charges of misusing the national press support fund. He dismissed allegations regarding corruption at the education ministry and with the press funds, as well as the burning of a political opponent's car, as part of a political conspiracy to disqualify him as a potential candidate for the 2009 presidential elections. End Summary.

12. Amadou said that the plot to remove him from office began in 2004, when President Tandja, his "political companion," insisted that Amadou remain prime minister to build the ruling MNSD party and his "political destiny." Hama stated that he had intended to resign from his position as prime minister and run for the presidency in 2004, but Tandja pressed influential MNSD members to "beg" him not to do so. He ultimately withdrew his candidacy to the legislative elections, abandoned his plans for the 2004 presidential election, and worked for Tandja's reelection to a second term. He realized that he had made a mistake when he discovered that his "political companion's" ulterior motive was to undermine his political ascension and seek a third term for himself.

13. Amadou claimed that the Education Ministry (MEBA) case was aimed at tarnishing his political image. He apologized to former education ministers Ari Ibrahim and Harouna Hamani for the ordeal they went through in this case, because he thought they were only "collateral victims" of this political manipulation. He claimed that because he was so popular, he stood in the way of other potential candidates, including "those who dream of a third term or of getting an extension of some sort," and therefore he had become the man to get rid of.

14. Concerning the burning of MNSD youth leader Moussa Keita's car, Amadou indicated that political rivals within and outside the MNSD had been dogging him since the motion of no confidence that ousted him from power. He dismissed the charges of "complicity to arson" as another political ploy to undermine his image. He wondered why he would be charged with complicity while no other accomplices had been identified.

15. Regarding the press support fund, Hama mentioned that President Tandja instructed him to lead a media campaign to praise the government's policies and to promote Niger's image abroad. He acknowledged having received CFA 100 million (about \$240,000 at the current exchange rate), which he said he used for those purposes. He stressed that he did not know that it was taken from the press support fund. He mentioned that the law on the High Council on communication (which includes provisions on the press fund) was only passed in May 2000, and the legislation implementing it was not passed until 2006. Under these circumstances, he claimed that he could not have given the money to the media regulating body which is charged with distributing funds to the various media. Amadou further said that the 2001 budget expenditure (which includes the funds in question) was approved by the Audit Chamber of the Supreme Court and therefore any funds were considered as legally used. Amadou claimed that this was also a political move to find a legal pretext to get rid of him.

16. Comment: Amadou's defense strategy appears to be to attack

Tandja, whom he sees as being behind the charges. He strongly criticized the president's special development program. He speculated that Tandja intends to seek a third term, and warned that Nigeriens would take to the streets to denounce and counter these attempts. Amadou's attack on the president may backfire if the president takes the issue personally and ensures Amadou's prosecution. He threatened that if he goes to jail, others will soon follow.

17. If the National Assembly votes a resolution of indictment, it will refer the case to the Supreme Court's prosecution department. The Supreme Court will set up an investigative commission made up of three judges. The investigative commission will either determine that there are grounds for prosecution and refer the case to the High Court of Justice for trial, or dismiss the charges for lack of evidence. There is no legal deadline for the Supreme Court to complete its investigation.

ALLEN